

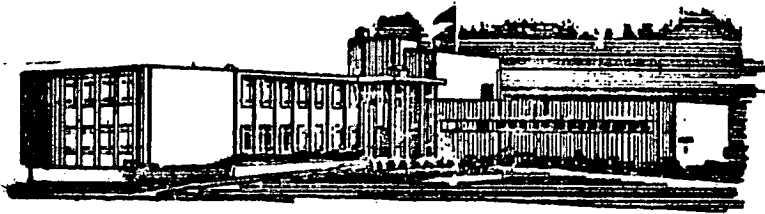
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# ***DIRECTIONS***

for growth policy in montgomery co. 

final report of THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON COUNTY  
GROWTH  
POLICY  
august 74





## **MONTGOMERY COUNTY PLANNING BOARD**

**OFFICE OF THE CHAIRMAN**

**April 18, 1973**

### **MEMORANDUM # 1: URBAN GROWTH POLICY**

**FROM: Royce Hanson, Chairman, MCPB**

This Memorandum is meant to set down some of my preliminary thinking about the development of growth policy for the Washington Metropolitan area and Montgomery County. I emphasize preliminary thinking and hope that the meaning of the phrase will be understood if I should, in the light of discussion of these and other ideas, later change my mind. It is altogether conceivable that I would change my mind several times! One of the characteristics of a sound policy-making process should be the abandonment of policies which logic or experience demonstrate are not wise.

This Memorandum is largely directed to my colleagues at the Montgomery County Planning Board and the Land Use Policy Committee of the Council of Governments. With time and luck, I plan to expand on this, to deal more specifically with other items and issues of growth policy.

**RH:ny**

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1. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 1997; 278: 1039-1044.

## Urbanization Policy for Metropolitan Washington & Montgomery County

The irony of planning is that policies for the future must inevitably be based upon the publicly perceived experience of the past. What I mean by this is that whatever the objective facts may be and whatever they may have appeared to have been according to historians of this age, what matters in policy making is what people think the facts are. What they think are the facts is conditioned by their direct and vicarious experience gained through the media as they hear it from gossip, pop theory of what government, planning, growth, non-growth, ecology or other things are all about. We have many myths to shatter in the development of a viable policy for the management of the process of urbanization in this region and, therefore, we frequently have a very naive comprehension of what urban growth policy might consist.

Historically, the development policies of local governments in this region have reinforced or at the very least, accommodated the private market as conventional wisdom defined the market's needs. Local and regional policies are also greatly circumscribed by the character, or lack thereof, of urbanization policies of federal and state governments. In many cases federal, state, and even local governments have failed to recognize that various functional programs have profound effects on the process and character of urbanization.

Policy to manage urbanization has, nonetheless, become politically desirable and possible. Such policy can be built upon a considerable intellectual and experiential legacy from the countries of Western Europe and our own American political tradition. The establishment of Greenbelt in Prince George's County and the continued vitality of that community demonstrates that good planning can be done and that it can be effective. On broader scale, the Tennessee Valley Authority, the work the National Resources Planning Board, and the activities of the Regional Planning Association of America in the early part of this Century provide a rich basis for attempting to manage resources and growth to achieve important public ends. This policy tradition has been renewed and reinforced by the 1970 Housing Act, and although the present administration has failed to either understand or heed that Act, it remains as a legislative citadel for those who seek a better way of helping the country respond to and guide the urban growth that it will surely receive.

The calamities of the 1960's and those present situations apparent even to the most obtuse troglodyte are bringing about local and regional pressures for policy to manage urbanization. The growing deficit of low and moderate income housing in this region, the continuing pattern of racial segregation, the all too recent incidences of urban violence, the continuing rate of criminal activity and the environmental crises in water and air quality, water supply, and the shortage of energy, all contribute to public



acceptance of the need for better policy. The inefficiencies of our transportation system become only greater as the region expands and it is increasingly apparent that Metro is no panacea. Local governments are beginning here, as elsewhere in the country, to recognize that revenue sharing offers no dispensation from fiscal purgatory. In summary, most of what we have done thus far not only has not worked; in many cases it has exacerbated our problems and encumbered our future. By and large what we have done thus far is to look upon these situations as "problems" which can be solved. Our narrow definition of problems and the resulting functional approach to those problems generally have failed because we have not understood the organic, the systemic nature of the processes of urban and environmental change.

The management of urbanization and its consequences should be the central concerns of domestic politics in the next decade. In managing urbanization we must be concerned with two things above others. The first is "due dates;" by that I mean that when we are thinking about a policy we must be reasonably sure that there is time left to accomplish it. Over many things we do not have control, because the due date for controlling those things has already gone by, the decisions having already been made. We can, in the short run, only ameliorate the consequences. An illustration of the importance of due dates is decision to build a particular trunk sewer, which sets in motion development pressures which may have far reaching consequences. Another example can be seen in the rezoning of Friendship Heights for commercial development, resulting in changes in land prices, and commercial or apartment construction which cannot now be reversed, regardless of what may be done with the few remaining parcels. If we make decisions now to do certain things, while we can exercise some limited control over the consequences, we will severely limit our future options.

Secondly, we must be greatly concerned with the effect of urbanization on the efficacy of democratic institutions. We operate not only to serve and respond to the needs of the people who are here now, but also as trustees of future generations as well. We operate institutions that are not ours out of the context of historic time but are a part of a tradition extending back at least to the enlightenment and forward into an infinite future. The way in which we develop growth policy and the way in which we carry it out must be a central consideration, because it touches so many aspects of the democratic process, and particularly so at the local governmental level.

My objectives, then, are to redefine the nature of the metropolis in the last quarter of this century, to access the capacity of our institutions to democratically guide its future development, and to outline the elements of a practical public policy for guiding growth and change for a humane regional city.

## I - THE OLD CITY AND THE NEW METROPOLIS

The Metropolis of the 1970's is not only larger, it is different, and ten years hence it will be different still. As a region grows it does not become simply more of what it was before. The Washington Metropolitan area no longer has a pervasively dominant core. It has become multi-centered. The various centers are specialized, including the old downtown. The functions of the central city and its business district have radically changed from dominating the retail market of the region to become only one of several retail centers. The core area has become a center of transactional enterprise, which means that its function has shifted more to office employment. The central city has moved from economic domination of the region to increasing dependence upon the region for its economic survival. Washington, D. C. has, since 1950, also moved from a surplus to a deficit fiscal position and from a diverse to a specialized population.

The old city is the most obvious victim of past public and private policies affecting urbanization, principally those which governed the housing market through the financing of suburban development and perpetuation of racial discrimination in the marketing of housing. The old city is also the victim of transportation policies which increasingly sought to accommodate the automobile. Policies which looked upon the provision of water and sewers as nothing more than an engineering response to existing needs generated by growth contributed to the pattern of sprawling development at low densities. These factors--the housing market, transportation and sanitary systems--all contributed in turn to a particular distribution of people by income and employment throughout the region, and the resulting disparities between suburbs and central city in public services heavily financed by property taxes as the prime basis of local revenue. Concurrently, business technology in the post-industrial age demanded different kinds of locations than in the past. The vertical plant is virtually a thing of the past and the importance of truck and air transportation demand locations which cannot be readily accommodated in central cities.

This decline in the economic fortunes of central cities has led to and accelerated the deterioration of community services such as neighborhood sanitation and public safety and has provided a fit setting for central city government that frequently exhibits above all else its incapacity to operate effectively.

The cumulative result of these conditions and old policies is that more than 100 percent of the net population increase over the past two decades has been in the suburbs. It would appear that this trend may continue for at least another decade. Over 90 percent of the net increase in the housing stock since 1960 has occurred in the suburbs and almost 80 percent increase in employment has also occurred there. In this light it is easy to see why the single function-problem approaches to managing urban growth and change,

such as urban renewal, public housing, or mass transit, make, at best, only marginal improvements in some conditions. Racism has been an escapably important institutional factor in the decentralization of the metropolis, but more as a reinforcer of many of these other trends, which are more often fundamental economic and social forces which would exist regardless of the character of the racial problem.

The new metropolis of the 1970's is segregated by race, class and life-style more than it is by central city and suburban jurisdictions. The metropolitan antimonies of the 1950's and 1960's are outdated and the economic and social basis of a new metropolitan politics is different, because the second element in redefining a metropolis is the urbanization of the suburbs.



## II - THE URBANIZATION OF THE SUBURBS

The basic function of the suburbs has undergone radical transformation in the past two decades. The suburbs are no longer commuter bedrooms for people who work downtown. Since 1950 the proportion of federal employment located in the suburbs has risen from 8 to 62 percent of the total. The proportion of the labor force in each of the counties which is locally employed has also dramatically changed. Some suburbs are becoming labor importers; some employ higher percentage of their residents than the District of Columbia. Over half of Montgomery County's labor force works in the county. Suburban economic activities are diversified. Currently, about 75 percent of the region's retail sales occur in the suburbs; a majority of demand deposits are now in suburban banks; service industries are springing up in the suburbs; and an increasing amount of manufacturing and warehousing activity is locating in the suburbs as access to interstate transportation systems has improved.

Life-styles are changing as well. The suburbs are no longer as clearly dominated by the single-family neighborhood as they were but a few years ago. In ten years multi-family households in Montgomery County have risen from 18 to 31 percent of the total. And in Prince George's County multi-family housing has more than doubled--rising from 27 to 45 percent in the same period of time. Arlington County now has a majority of its households living in multi-family dwellings.

The population densities of the suburbs are no longer uniformly sparse. Within the Beltway densities are as "urban" as many of the communities inside the District's boundaries. In fact, some of the highest density areas of the metropolis are in the suburbs. The growth of major high-intensity business and industrial centers, such as Ardwick and McLean-Tysons Corner's, the 70-S Corridor, Crystal City, and Rosslyn are all illustrations of the great change which has occurred in a very short period of time.

There has also been change in local communities and in their populations. The past decade has produced the "inner suburbs"-- areas in the suburban jurisdictions which are assuming some of the functions for minorities and lower income people which were once performed primarily by the central city. The TESS area of Montgomery County, parts of Wheaton and Rockville well illustrate this characteristic. In Prince George's County the extension of the black ghetto is increasingly apparent. And more and more black minorities, Spanish-speaking minorities, and such white minorities as the Appalachians are finding their first metropolitan home in the inner suburbs rather than the inner city. The out migration of black families from the District of Columbia has increased at least tenfold in the past five years.

With all of these things occurring we can anticipate, in fact we can already see, the development of traditional urban problems in the suburbs. The emergence of serious slum conditions, transportation crises with centers of congestion and activity, the deterioration of schools, and substandard municipal services, although the same service may be rendered today that was rendered just a few years ago but for a different population.

The main thrust of suburban development policy is still on new growth, but the old areas increasingly compete for the available public resources and the time of public officials. In all likelihood these areas will increasingly demand a larger share of public resources in absolute terms as well as higher per capita expenditures than they now receive. The urbanization of the suburbs will place new stress upon major urban systems such as transportation and particularly on Metro, which, perhaps unavoidably is being built on assumptions based in the political economy of the 1950's rather than the 1970's or 1990's. Metro, in turn, will reinforce some aspects of the decentralization of the region, such as office activity, and it will generate severe development and traffic problems in some station areas.

The suburban fisc has been premised on growth but the virtually unlimited pursuit of growth has produced severe environmental problems which not only promise a heavy fiscal impact but operate both technically and politically to constrain further development. This in part is due to the fact that suburban growth has not been well balanced, distributed or priced to pay for the public services which it requires. We are presented with the paradox of a Metropolitan area with a basically healthy economy containing at the same time several unhealthy local fiscal situations. Ironically, the greatest fiscal crises are in the District of Columbia, where the least growth has occurred, and in Prince George's County, where growth has been the most rampant.

The processes of urban change have also produced a crises for many people in personal and community identity. Increasing anomie and alienation in the suburbs challenges the capacity and legitimacy of suburban governments much as the deterioration of cities challenged the capacity and the integrity of central city government in the 1960's. In many respects the political battles which are very likely to be fought over growth policy will not be between the central city residents and the residents of the suburbs but within each suburban jurisdiction between the urbanite and the suburban and antiurban forces of the population. By this I mean that there will be conflict between those who are trying to understand and cope with the forces of urban change and those who wish these forces would go away so that we could somehow return to a simpler and less complicated age secure from pressures on any suburban community, where the air is clear and free, and where there is no traffic congestion, no minorities in the schools and a low tax rate. A major problem in developing constructive growth policies derives from the probability that there is no viable urbanite political coalition in any jurisdiction or in the metropolis as a whole. Coalitions

can probably be generated, however, that are composed of various antiurban and suburban forces. Part of the fight necessarily will revolve around two very healthy resurgent forces; those of the environmental movement and of humanism. These movements are challenging the conventional wisdom of growth and can be very constructive forces in dealing with its many problems. At the same time, however, they present the very real danger of merely substituting new mythology to replace the old.

### III - THE NEW REGIONAL CITY

Now as if all this were not enough to confound any attempt to develop public policy to manage urbanization a new regional city is beginning to take form, involving not only Metropolitan Washington, but Metropolitan Baltimore as well. This regional city in many respects holds the hope and despair of the future. It forces us to confront the severe ecological limits caused by development pressures. I hope it will force us to deal with some of the problems of human scale and sensitivity which so much of our recent development has ignored. And, of course, the Regional City compounds the difficulties of planning and governance by introducing not just regional but a bi-regional scale for which there is no organization at the present, even a weak one. The Baltimore-Washington Corridor and its Bi-Metropolitan Area raises many policy issues; the organization of growth in a spatial sense, the relationship of areas of new growth to areas of great internal stress, the availability and distribution of housing for different income levels, racial distribution and equality of public services and environmental and fiscal impact. The Corridor problem dramatizes the policy issues of balanced growth in systemic versus political terms.

"Balance" is probably the single most ill-used word in planning. In the context of growth policy if we use it in systemic terms, then we mean development consistent with environmental constraints. We also mean economic equilibrium between housing, jobs, labor forces and transportation at both community and regional scales. We mean the resettlement of people and industry consistent with environmental constraints and labor force criteria. We mean growth of a type and at a rate which produces the balance between revenues and expenditures necessary for the entire system of the region and equalized to its various parts. We mean a broader distribution of economic and social benefits.

But if we mean balance in political terms, then we mean a little something for everybody - a system in which "nobody gets hurt". We mean artificial respiration for areas which probably ought not grow in attempts to resuscitate dying or declining areas of cities and regions and an excess of new subsidies over new revenues. We mean the prevention of some growth where it probably should occur and the pursuit at times of contradictory policies, such as the simultaneous subsidization of mass transit and parking.

The difficult problem is not in distinguishing the objectives of a balanced growth policy, but in achieving it. As our present institutions operate this is bound to be difficult. It will require action of every level of government because

growth policy, to be effective, must operate at national and state, regional and local scales. The problem in the two Metropolitan areas is, of course, that there are utterly no political institutions now concerned with them that have any capability of producing effective policy to deal with their problems in any coordinated fashion. The center of the regional city of the future is being planned as the tangents of both of the old Metropolises and the States, though not totally ignoring the problem, are not deeply concerned with it at the present time. We now come to the issues of both process and substance of policy for the management of urbanization.

#### IV - NEW TOWNS GROWTH CENTERS IN THE URBAN FUTURE

First, I would emphasize again that policy decisions are required at every governmental level. And I would suggest that policy is more than a statement of hope, or even a resolution. Policy exists when the action which government will take in a given situation is reasonably predictable. We need national policies which give incentives for the resettlement of people and industry consistent with national and regional objectives. We need much more federal emphasis on affirmative action for fair housing, for example. We need income supplements to allow the Metropolitan Housing Market to operate so that good housing can be made more available to people of modest means. Federal policy should also give preference in all forms of assistance to planned new towns and communities, particularly to those sponsored and endorsed by regional and local planning authorities. Such policy would include federal assistance to state and local development corporations. It would probably involve something like what the Senate is currently discussing in S-268, The National Land Use Policy Act of 1973, whereby states would lose federal assistance if they failed to do certain things. It would mean disincentives to other forms of development than those which are well planned. And federal assistance should relate the reform of the entire governmental revenue structure and to the capacity to govern regions undergoing urbanization.

State policies are needed to deal with the location and size of new cities, especially those in and around the Baltimore-Washington regions. State policies must comprehend the concept of metropolitan capital investments so that the many expenditures of state government can be coordinated to encourage orderly development rather than to contribute to disorderly development. State capital investment coordination is particularly needed in expenditures for roads, transit, airports, colleges, hospitals and other major state institutions. State revenue reform is badly needed to reduce disparities in public services, to help manage development and to finance subregional facilities or programs. State tax policies which encourage land speculation in fringe areas, such as preferential farmland assessment, must be reviewed and changed if we are ever to have a rational method of managing growth.

States need to strengthen county and metropolitan political institutions. In both Virginia and Maryland there is a trend towards sub-state regionalism and this trend should be strengthened and the activities of the sub-state regions expanded and made more politically responsible. Stronger local government is required. I see no inconsistency between calling for an expanding role for state governments and strengthening of local governments. In fact, both are utterly necessary to deal with the immense job which we now confront.

In Maryland I would strongly recommend that the "shared power" approach to local government be extended through state constitutional amendment so local governments can be freed from many Nineteenth Century shackles they now must bear. The state should recognize the need of local governments for things like development districts and development corporations and allow them to create such organizations so long as there is no inconsistency with state law.

State policies relating to development need to be coordinated, not only at the capital investment level, but throughout state government. Rather than establishing new ad hoc organizations such as state land use commissions and planning commissions, it would make a great deal more sense to create an urban affairs council at the cabinet level in each state. This cabinet committee should be staffed from the Governor's office and the Governor insist that it produce urban growth policy for the state, identifying the things in which the state has concern so that these matters can be brought back to the governor and the state legislature for action. In both Maryland and Virginia consideration should be given to the creation of state urban development corporations to sponsor, or even, produce new communities in association with local government and sub-state planning agencies in the two metropolitan areas. In some cases I think candor would compel us to admit that if new communities having a proper mix of income, ages, and races are to be created they will be created only over the objection of local governments.

Land use law will need substantial reform. Currently the relationship between planning and land use regulation is somewhat tenuous as a consequence of state law. If planning is ultimately to be effective, it probably is going to have to attain a more authoritative position in law. There needs to be a basis in state law for local judgment of the impact of development on public services and the fiscal stability of local government. And there needs to be state legislation which will permit local government participation in development short of the urban renewal process.

In the absence, at least in the short term, of effective regional institutions we shall have to develop a strategy for managing urbanization that finds a strong basis in political consensus among the local governments and people of the two metropolitan areas. I think we shall have to agree on a basic strategy for urban development based on development centers or regional downtowns-central business districts for the pluralistic metropolis-designed to absorb a great deal of the commercial and industrial development of the region and to provide easily accessible employment centers. Such centers are necessary so that clear policies can emerge that give the best possible assurance to many residential communities that they will not have their stability constantly endangered by being equal to every other place as a target for economic expansion.

A second category of centers will be the transit and beltway subcenters, smaller mixed use areas, but more highly specialized and limited than the regional downtowns. A third type of development center would be new towns, both satellites such as Reston, Columbia or Germantown, and new towns-in-towns such as Fort Lincoln. Wherever possible, the redevelopment of the inner city and the inner suburbs where possible at new town scale should be linked with the development of some satellite new towns to make sure that we are producing the kind of economic and social opportunity necessary to share the benefits of regional growth in such a way that we reduce, rather than increase, the economic disparities and social injustices of the region.

Concurrent with the development of growth centers--indeed, a concomitant of such policy--we must have a strategy for the protection and enhancement of environmental areas. This will involve active acquisition of permanent open space needed for ecological reasons and to structure development patterns. It will also involve a far more active public role in protecting the micro environment of centers, neighborhoods and planning areas through insistence upon good urban design and careful attention to environmental considerations such as air quality, storm water, open and recreation space, pedestrian systems and physical relationships among structures.

Development centers and environmental areas can and should be linked into a new regional city. The development centers should absorb almost all new population. Over a thirty year period they should absorb virtually all the needy people and provide a system for upward mobility within the metropolis. The basic idea of a regional strategy for the management of urbanization is to harness the dynamics of development to the public interest. The substance of such a policy is to produce systemic balance in regional and sub-regional terms in the relationships among land uses, in economic activities, in revenues and expenditures, in environmental impact, in needs and services. At the regional level, our policy should have a preference for large scale, coordinated development and for the production of the institutional as well as the physical changes required to produce the necessary policies. Institutional changes should be geared to facilitate urban growth policy making to encourage the proper development of the growth centers, and the retention of the environmental areas. This means regional policies should encourage land assembly consistent with growth center objectives. They should also require coordination of public investment and



services, provide financing mechanisms for front end money for development or for special services and facilities, and State and regional policy must allow the necessary innovations at the local governmental level.

Regional planning must increasingly become comprehensive rather than functional in its orientation. It must comprehend not only the physical elements which are the traditional parts of regional planning, but those physical elements increasingly will have to be planned in relationship to social objectives and programs. At the regional and at the local scale we must be concerned for more sensitive and responsive land use plans and regulations. Central business district plans, the sector planning process, new zones for planned development and for new towns, adequate public facilities ordinances, and other measures are fundamental institutional reforms which are essential to the realization of any local or regional strategy for guiding growth. In the decade ahead we will move away from euclidean zoning for each parcel land, to a heavier reliance upon performance and impact standards for districts within which different densities are needed. We will encourage innovation in design, in land conservation and in cost reduction. We will make far wider use of pricing mechanisms to regulate the modal split, to subsidize some services and burden other choices, to assist in land conservation or conversion and to permit ourselves a more accurate assessment of the externalities of development prior to permitting it to occur. I think we will also investigate and perhaps come up with some new institutions in the public economy designed to provide a more rational land economy, in regional terms, to operate.

All these things will require, of course, a far more entrepreneurial approach by government, replacing its traditional regulatory stance. And they imply an open admission of what has long been a fact: urban development is a mixed economy, a public-private joint venture requiring both stability and change. Governmental reform will be a necessary concomitant of the policy for the management of urbanization. It will involve not only sharing power with states, and the strengthening of regional institutions, but at the local level, the decentralization and delegation of county powers to sensitize local governments, temper programs and improve and humanize the administration of services.

## V - CONCLUSIONS

Urban development, then, in its broadest sense is the region's most basic and critical problem. A sound strategy for managing urban growth and change could make possible the resolution of many of the most crucial social and economic problems we confront. Development policy will have to consider not only the Washington area but the new regional city and the multi-centered character of the new metropolis. Growth policy should be based upon a physical strategy of development centers and environmental areas. The successful management of urbanization depends upon concerted action at every level of the political system. Major institutional changes are required in financing and revenue systems, land assembly, planning and development, regulation and governance. These changes will be required to permit the pairing of development and the sharing of costs and benefits on a regional basis as well as at a lower scale on a county basis. And the public posture will have to be increasingly entrepreneurial rather than regulatory, if we are to be responsive and if we are to deal with urbanization in a comprehensive sense.

The more experience I have with local government, the greater is my concern with the ethical aspects which permit democracy to operate: tolerance, accountability, compromise and sharing responsibility are attributes which permit democratic institutions to work well and resolve conflict. Democracy, however, is an experiential and not an intellectual process. As the experience of citizens teaches them that they have diminishing control over their urban future I despair for our institutions.

We simply cannot afford another decade of muddling through; placing false hopes in placebos and slogans, pretending all is well while the sewers overflow, the river runs dry, crime rates soar, the housing deficit grows, taxes rise, traffic jams, the air stinks, development sprawls and we further reduce our ability to act decisively by letting change take its course. The most urgent item before us is the development of a self-conscious, self-knowing Metropolitan public with the wisdom and the resolution to produce an urbanization policy and the courage to reform the institutions necessary for its achievement. The first test we officials have, as local and regional opinion leaders, is to widely share our own knowledge and experience; to make the objective facts of regional life the political facts of local government so that decisions can be made which deal with reality rather than foster myth.